NORTH CAROLINA STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE

Office of Archives and History Department of Cultural Resources

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District

Four Oaks, Johnston County, JT1343, Listed 8/9/2006 Nomination by M. Ruth Little Photographs by M. Ruth Little, March 2006



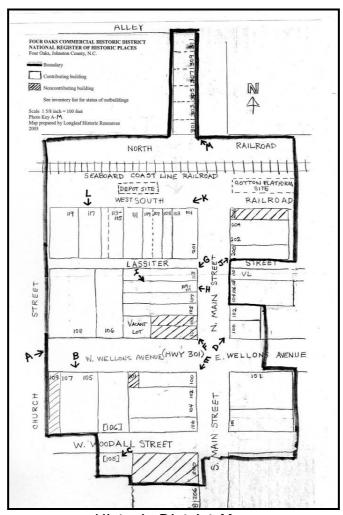
200 Block of North Main Street, east side, looking southeast



100 Block of West Wellons Avenue (Hwy. 301), looking northeast



100 Block of West South Railroad Street, looking southwest



Historic District Map

NPS Form 10-900 (Rev. 10-90) OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of property			
historic name <u>Four Oaks Commercial Histor</u>	ic District		
other names/site number			
2. Location			
street & number _100-300 blks North Main Street		Main Street; 100 blk S	
100 blk West Wellons Street; and 100 blk West	vvoodali Street		not for publication N/A
city or townFour Oaks			vicinity <u>N/A</u> _
state North Carolina code NC cour	nty <u>Johnston</u> code	e <u>101</u> zip code <u>2</u>	<u>?7524</u>
3. State/Federal Agency Certification			
As the designated authority under the National Histori request for determination of eligibility meets the Places and meets the procedural and professional rec does not meet the National Register Criteria. I re Nocally. (See continuation sheet for additional signature of certifying official Date	documentation standards fo quirements set forth in 36 CF ecommend that this property al comments.)	registering properties in the R Part 60. In my opinion, th	e National Register of Historic ne property <u>X</u> meets
_North Carolina Department of Cultura	al Resources		
State or Federal agency and bureau			
In my opinion, the property meets does no comments.)	t meet the National Register	criteria. (See continuat	ion sheet for additional
Signature of commenting or other official Date			
State or Federal agency and bureau			
4. National Park Service Certification			
I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper		Date of Action
entered in the National Register See continuation sheet. determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet. determined not eligible for the National Register			

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District

Johnston County, N. C.

Name of Property County and State

5. Classification				
Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)		Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)	
_X _ private public-local public-State public-Federal	buil _X distr site struc obje	ict		Noncontributing buildings sites structures objects Total
Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A		= -	Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A	
6. Function or Use				
Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions) Cat: Commerce/Trade		department store warehouse financial institution specialty store		
Transportation		restaurant rail-related road-related		
Current Functions				
(Enter categories from instructions) Cat: _Commerce/Trade		department store warehouse financial institution specialty store restaurant rail-related		
		road-related		
7. Description Architectural Classification	(Enter categories from	n instructions)		
Commercial Style Mission/Spanish Color Other: vernacular indu	nial Revival			
Materials (Enter categories from i foundation <u>brick</u> roof <u>asphalt</u> walls <u>brick</u> concrete	nstructions)			
other <u>wood</u> vinvl		-		

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Name of Property

County and State

8. Statement of Significance				
Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)	Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions) Commerce			
_X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.	Architecture			
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.				
X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.	Period of Significance _ca. 1890-ca. 1957			
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.	Significant Dates _N/A			
Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)				
A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes B removed from its original location.	Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A			
-				
C a birthplace or a grave.	Cultural Affiliation			
D a cemetery.	<u>N/A</u>			
E a reconstructed building, object,or structure.				
F a commemorative property.				
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.	Architect/Builder Unknown			
Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)				
9. Major Bibliographical References				
Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one of	or more continuation sheets.)			
Previous documentation on file (NPS) preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) hat previously listed in the National Register previously determined eligible by the National Register designated a National Historic Landmark recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #	· 			
Primary Location of Additional Data _X_ State Historic Preservation Office Other State agency Federal agency Local government University Other Name of repository:				

Name of Property

10. Geographical Data

County and State

Acreage of Property _approx. 10 acres					
UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a	continuation sheet)				
Zone Easting Northing 1 17	Zone Easting Northing 3 _17 733500 3925280 4 17 733300 _3925170 See continuation sheet.				
Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)					
Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)					
11. Form Prepared By					
name/titleM. Ruth Little and Carrie Ehrfurth					
organizationLongleaf Historic Resources	dateNovember 2005				
street & number <u>515-A St. Mary's St</u> te	elephone_919.412.7804				
city or town Raleigh	state_NC_zip code _27607				
12. Additional Documentation					
Submit the following items with the completed form: Continuation Sheets					
Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the part A sketch map for historic districts and properties having Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the pro-	ng large acreage or numerous resources.				
Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)					
Property Owner					
(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)					
name					
street & number	telephone				
city or town	state zip code				
	cted for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate nd to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a ended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).				

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

Section 7: Description

The Four Oaks Commercial Historic District consists of the core of the town of Four Oaks, in southwest Johnston County, North Carolina. The district is located north and south of the railroad tracks (historically the Seaboard Coast Line), contains approximately nine blocks of commercial and warehouse buildings dating from ca. 1890 to ca. 1957. The gridded street plan is centered on the railroad right of way with North Railroad Street on the north side of the railroad and South Railroad Street on the south side of the railroad tracks, running parallel. Main Street is perpendicular to the railroad tracks. There is a secondary main street known as Wellons Avenue one block south of the tracks. Wellons Avenue is also Highway 301 connecting Four Oaks and the county seat of Smithfield. The intersection of Main and Wellons is the center point of the street numbering system. The commercial district consists of the 100-300 blocks of North Main Street, the 100-200 blocks of South Main Street, and includes the 100 blocks of the following cross streets: West Woodall Street, Lassiter Street, West Wellons Avenue, and West South Railroad Street. It also includes 101 East Wellons Avenue. The town's main commercial activities were originally focused along South Railroad Street which runs parallel to the railroad tracks, but as the impact of the automobile increased, Main Street became the central commercial street.

Thirty-four buildings stand in the Four Oaks Commercial Historic District, twenty-nine of which contribute to the historic character of the downtown district. The railroad tracks, used frequently by Amtrak and CSX, are a contributing structure in the district. The five buildings that are noncontributing are either built outside the period of significance or have had character-altering changes. The W.E. Stanley Store was built ca.1890 on the east side of the 100 block of North Main Street. It was moved in 1947 to the south side of West Woodall Street, and is the oldest building in the district.

The Blake Adams Store at 101 South West Railroad Street is the oldest relatively-unaltered brick commercial building in the district. It retains its corbeled brick upper façade with a cornice panel with a decorative brick "1904" date, although the storefront has been replaced. The original Four Oaks Bank Building at 105 West South Railroad Street retains its entire original façade, with an arched entrance and a large arched display window modestly reminiscent of the Richardsonian Romanesque style of the late 1800s. A row of three one- and two-story brick commercial buildings of ca. 1915 at 105, 107, and 109 North Main Street retain their original facades, with recessed center double wooden doors, flanking display windows with wood paneled wainscots, and decorative brick cornices. These stores have operated as Austin's Feed Store throughout most of the twentieth century. The ca. 1925 Lassiter Building, 301-311 North Main Street, containing six stores that occupy the entire block, is the only example in the district of the speculative commercial development that is common in larger towns. The W. D. Allen Building, 117 West South Railroad Street, is perhaps the last example of the decorative brick late nineteenth century style. Its cornice panel functions like a cornerstone, with Mr. Allen's name spelled out in raised bricks, along with the construction date "FEB. 15, 1926." This retarditaire

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 2

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

tradition displays the owner's pride in the completion of his building.

Commercial buildings of the mid-1920s to the early 1950s, such as the Lassiter Building, 301-311 North Main Street; Four Oaks Drugstore, 200 North Main Street; the Four Oaks Bank and Trust Company, 113 North Main Street; and Barnes Furniture Store, 100 South Main Street, ca. 1949; represent the early twentieth century commercial style, with a plain, flat appearance relieved by patterned brick or concrete panels and windows arranged in groups. The drugstore's storefront dates from 1937, and features a recessed door with sidelights and transom, and flanking display windows. The interior contains cabinets and display cases that are believed to date to 1937, and a 1947 soda fountain.

Two historic gas stations survive along Wellons Avenue, which became NC Highway 22 in the mid-1920s. The Sinclair Gas Station at 107 West Wellons Avenue is a Spanish Colonial Revival-syle stuccoed station built about ca. 1930s. The station features a front porte-cochere with a decorative gabled parapet, and a side service bay with a terra cotta tile pent roof. A large two-story automotive garage was added to the east side in the mid-twentieth century, but the character of the original station still survives. At 101 East Wellons Avenue, the Moderne-style rectangular one-story Esso Gas Station, clad in metal panels with streamlined corners, was built in 1957 to replace the ca 1925 small Esso station that stood on this site.

A warehouse and stable built in the 1930s-1940s stand at 106 and 108 West Wellons Avenue, reflecting another important function of the town of Four Oaks as an agricultural supply center. Number 106 is the Floyd Price Blacksmith Shop, a concrete block and corrugated metal gable-front warehouse with a front office. It later housed Stanley-Wilson Feed and Seed Company. Number 108 is the Wade Stanley Stable. Its ridge top monitor roof and west side loading dock reflect its use as a mule stable. The only restaurant in the district is the Ole Time Grill at 101 West Wellons Street. The small front-gabled concrete block building was constructed of frame in 1946 as Thornton's Lunch, and was rebuilt in concrete block in the 1960s or 1970s.

The commercial district retains integrity of location, setting, workmanship, feeling, and association from its period of significance from ca. 1890 to 1957. As a town that grew up around a railroad, its historic character is enhanced by the frequent train comings and goings. Due to minor alterations to storefronts, the redistributing of store space, and change in use, some buildings exhibit compromised integrity of design and materials, but they retain their overall massing and contribute to the feeling of a small historic downtown as a whole. Some historic buildings have lost their integrity because of character-changing alterations. The D.H. Sanders Hardware Store and the Keen Store at 101 and 103 North Main Street, despite a rich history, have been stuccoed and their storefronts replaced.

Inventory List

Note: The following inventory list is arranged alphabetically by street name, north side first,

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 3

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

then south side; east side first, then west side. A few buildings have no assigned street numbers. A logical number has been assigned for the purpose of this nomination, and is indicated in brackets []. All buildings are categorized as C (contributing) or NC (noncontributing) based on the following criteria. Contributing buildings were constructed prior to 1957 and retain their architectural integrity. Any building built after the end of the period significance, 1957, is noncontributing due to its age (NC-age). Buildings built before 1957 that have lost their architectural integrity because of substantial additions and/or alterations incompatible with their historic pre-1957 character are categorized as noncontributing because of these changes (NC-alt). The buildings are named for their original or early owners or tenants. Due to the lack of Sanborn maps or city directories for Four Oaks, construction dates were difficult to establish. The principal sources for dates are a list compiled by Jack Austin Sr., probably ca. 2000 [hereinafter referred to as Austin list], the newspaper articles of James Bryan Creech published from 1977 to the 1990s in *The Four Oaks News*; and interviews with many long-time residents.

N. Main St., 100 Block, East side

100 N. Main St. C 1912

Corner Drugstore. 1 story brick building. Dentil cornice with a recessed corbelled brick panel above the original angled corner entrance. Corner entrance has been replaced with display windows. Wooden display storefront on Main St. side with single door. The display storefront has been altered to be flush with the façade and have large display windows. In the rear, 3 segmental arched window openings have been bricked up. George Kemp Massengill constructed the building. Bert Barefoot ran a drugstore in this building for 50 years which closed in the 1950s. Current tenant is Curves fitness center.

102 N. Main St. C 1912 **G. K. Massengill Building.** 1 story brick building with a terracotta tile cap. 2 corbelled recessed brick panels are above the storefront. The south storefront has a recessed single wood and glaze door. The north storefront has been replaced by a flat glass and metal storefront. A replacement awning spans the length of the entire building. In the rear, 4 segmental arched window openings have been bricked up, and the 2 segmental arched doors have been replaced as well. George Kemp Massengill constructed the building. Beacon Thrift Shop is the current tenant of both store spaces.

N. Main St., 100 Block, West side

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 4

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

101 N. Main St. NC – alt. 1908; ca. 1990 **D. H. Sanders Hardware Store.** 2 story brick corner building with façade stuccoed over, ca. 1990. 2 second story replacement windows. Classically detailed wooden replacement display storefront with recessed double door and wood panel wainscoting. The rear has also stuccoed over, with 2 segmental arched 4/4 original sash windows and a segmental arched double glass door. Along the side of the building are 3 second story replacement windows and 2 4-light fixed first story windows. In interior are original beadboard ceilings and an early rear stair to the second floor. Dave Sanders ran a hardware store here, with his son Dave Jr. continuing it until 1975. Current tenant is Sloan Graphics owned by Ron Sloan. [Heritage, 62]

103 N. Main St. NC – alt. Ca. 1915; ca. 1990 **Keen Store.** 1 story, originally identical to 105 N. Main, but now altered building with stuccoed façade. Wood display storefront with original wood panel wainscoting and transom covered with vinyl siding. Original cast iron Doric columns flanking doorway set on steel threshold with "The Jno A. McKay MFC, Dunn, NC" label. Albert Keen operated a dry goods here in the 1920s. [Creech, 8-14-1990]

105 N. Main St. C Ca.1915 Raymond Temple Grocery Store. 1 story brick commercial building with brick corbelled cornice above a recessed brick panel. Original wood display storefront with recessed double door that is flanked by cast-iron Doric columns with steel threshold made by McKay Manufacturing of Dunn, N.C. Storefront has large transom windows and wood panel apron. Concrete block addition in the rear with loading dock. Raymond Temple operated a grocery here and may have built the building. It has housed a part of Austin's Feed Store since the 1930s. Joseph H. "Doc" Austin operated the store until about 1945, with his son Aubrey Austin continuing the store until his death in 2005.

<u>C Raymond Temple Warehouse.</u> Ca. 1920, ca. 1950. 1 story concrete block and metal warehouse, located across the alley behind the store. Stepped gable brick party wall, facing W. Wellons hides the front of the concrete block portion of the warehouse. Front gable corrugated metal warehouse attached in rear with garage doors along the side facing alley.

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 5

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

107 N. Main St. C Ca. 1915 **Austin's Feed Store.** 1 story brick commercial building with brick corbelling along the cornice with sawtooth brick course below. 2 recessed corbelled brick panels above an original display storefront. Storefront has recessed double door with wood panel apron and large transom windows. A shed roof covers the rear porch. Joseph H. "Doc" Austin operated the store until about 1945, with his son Aubrey Austin continuing the store until his death in 2005.

109-111 N. Main St. C Ca. 1915 **Austin's Men's and Boy's Clothing.** 2 story brick commercial building with terracotta tile cap and brick pendants. 2nd story added at later date with 2 segmental 4/1 sash windows. Original wood display storefront with recessed glaze and panel door. Wood apron wall and large transom windows. Wilson Lewis operated a clothing store here from 1946 until 1955, when it became the third section of the Austin stores. During the later 1940s the second story was a movie theatre, with a separate entrance to the upstairs through a door on the facade. [Greg Stewart, 9/12/05]

113 N. Main St. C Ca. 1928, ca. 1938 **Four Oaks Bank and Trust.** 2 story brick commercial building with terracotta coping and a soldier course at the cornice. 2 pairs of 6/1 sash windows with soldier course surrounds on the second story. Late 1930s replacement glass and metal storefront with recessed double door. 4 large late 1930s replacement display windows along the first story side wall. 6 pairs of original 6/1 second story windows along the side. This building replaced the original building at 105 W. S. Railroad St. in 1928. It was apparently remodeled in the late 1930s. [Heritage, 63; Barber interview]

N. Main St., 200 Block, East side

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 6

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

200 N. Main St. C 1904, 1937 Four Oaks Drug Company. 2 story brick (painted) commercial building built in 2 stages. First story built in 1904, second story in 1937. 2 pairs of 6/1 sash windows on second story façade with 4 identical paired windows along the side. The wood and glass display storefront, a 1937 replacement, has recessed double door, sidelights, 4 light transom, and flanking display windows. Original rear 1 story brick doctor's office with corbelled cornice, built in 1904. Sawtooth course below cornice broken by corbelled blocks at corner and middle. The first story was built in 1904 as the D.H. Sanders Drugstore. Four Oaks Drug Company was founded in this building in 1904 and has continued to operate as such ever since. Dr. J.H. Stanley, one of the owners of the drugstore, operated his medical practice in the rear section in 1937. A new soda fountain was added in 1947, and original cabinets and display cases are still in use. Ralph Canaday was the druggist from 1918-1969, his son Bill has been the druggist since then. [Bill Canaday, 9/12/05; Heritage, 63]

Shed C, ca. 1950. Small corrugated tin front gable shed at rear.

202-204 N. Main St. C 1943 John W. Sanders Building. 1 story brick commercial building with deep metal awning over all three storefronts. 3 glass and metal storefronts, each with recessed doors and brick apron. The storefronts are recessed behind the upper façade, which is supported by 3 brick piers. In the later 1900s, Jack Austin Sr. and Jack Austin Jr. operated Austin Drugstore in no. 204, and his wife Cleo Austin operated Cleo's ladies clothing in no. 202. Current tenants are Kathy's Florist and Neese's Nook. [Creech, 1-17-1979]

206 N. Main St. NC - age c. 1960

Commercial Building. 1 story brick commercial building with shed on hip roof and deep awning. 2 large display windows flank single glass and metal door. Second storefront located on side of building facing the railroad. This building is located on the site of The Oaks theatre which burned down in 1942. Jack Austin Sr. built the current building about 1960. The current tenant is the Mane Street Salon. [Bill Canaday, 9/12/05]

N. Main St., 300 Block, West side

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 7

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

301-311 N. Main St. C Ca. 1925 Lassiter Building. 1 story brick commercial building with 5 storefronts. Each storefront has a front gabled parapet with projecting corner piers. Above each storefront is a rectangular panel outlined in stretcher bricks with corner blocks. 303 has the most intact storefront. Originally all display storefronts had recessed double doors with wood panel aprons. Each store now differs from the others as doors, display windows, or other storefront elements have been replaced over time. Originally all store rears had a double panel door flanked by 6/6 sash windows. Over time each store has made slight alterations to the rear elevation. 309 and 311 have rear additions, and 309 and 307 have added shed roof porches. Tom Lassiter constructed the building, and operated a grocery store in a portion of it. Current tenants are 301: Honeycutt and Grady CPAs; 303: Agape Church; 305-307: Four Oaks Fitness Center; 309: Barbara A. Keen Studio; 311: Potter's House Ministries.

S. Main St., 100 Block, East side

101 S. Main St. C Ca. 1950 Thompson Grocery Store. 2 story brick commercial building built as a grocery store. 3 paired 6/6 sash windows on the second story façade, and 2 6/6 sash windows on the upper sides. Large metal and glass display storefront with recessed area for two single doors and a metal awning. Large brick pier located at the front of the recessed area. Lassie Thompson constructed the building as a grocery store. Later grocers were Almon Adams, Pete Edwards, and Bill Joe Edwards. It is owned by Advent Christian Conference. The Kids Kampus Child Care Center occupies a portion of the building. [Austin list; Allen interview]

S. Main St., 100 Block, West side

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 8

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

100 S. Main St. C Ca. 1949 Barnes Furniture Store. 2 story brick commercial building with 2 paired 6/1 sash windows on second story. 8 more pairs of 6/1 sash windows are located along the W. Wellons Ave. elevation and the rear. Original pent awning wraps around the two façades of the building. Original storefront on Main St. consists of 2 single glass doors and two large display windows. Two additional storefronts are located along the W. Wellons Ave. façade. William Barnes built it as a furniture store. His daughter now operates it as the Four Oaks Furniture Liquidation Center. [George Thomas, 9-18-05; Williams interview]

102-104 S. Main St. C 1918 Massengill Hardware. 1 story brick commercial building with four storefronts. Wood display storefronts with panel wainscoting and recessed glazed and paneled doors. Above each door on the façade are 4 inset concrete blocks set in a diamond pattern. 104's two storefronts have been replaced. One by a garage door and the other by a small display window and single glaze and panel door. The rear has 4 segmental arch 6/6 sash windows and 2 segmental arch doors that have been replaced. The building was constructed by G. K. Massengill. Willard Massengill ran it as a hardware store from 1924. His son, Hubert, took over the store and ran it until the 1970s. Most of the building is now occupied by the Four Oaks Auction Gallery. Towne & Country Realty occupies the southernmost section. [Austin list; George Thomas, 9-18-05]

106 S. Main St. C 1938 **Commercial Building.** Small 1 story brick commercial building with glass and metal storefront consisting of two large display windows and single door. Its history is unknown. Gene's T.V. Shop occupied it for many years. It is currently vacant.

S. Main St., 200 Block, West side

200 S. Main St. NC - age 1979 **Four Oaks Small Engine Repair.** 1 story front gable concrete block commercial building. Corrugated metal awning across front façade. Single display window and door on storefront. Garage door in the back along the side of the building that faces Woodall St. Gerald Lee and his wife constructed it for this business in 1979. The Lees continue to operate the business. [Lee interview].

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 9

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

W. S. Railroad St.

101 W. S. Railroad St., 201 N. Main St. C 1904

Blake Adams General Store. 1 story brick commercial building with corbelled cornice. 2 recessed panels, one above the other are flanked by sawtooth brick course. Top panel is covered over with concrete and lower panel has "1904" date in raised brick. Storefront has been altered and now contains two glazed and panel doors. At rear is a storefront that faces N. Main St., No. 201. It originally was the office for the general store, but was remodeled ca. 1950. Current tenant: Marlene Dunn Photography. This building was built in 1904 by Blake Adams as a General Store. It is one of the oldest brick stores in town. [Bill Canaday Interview, 9/12/05]

103 W. S. Railroad St. C Ca. 1904 **Commercial Building.** 1 story brick commercial building with corbelled cornice. 2 recessed rectangular brick panels. Bottom, smaller panel flanked by sawtooth brick course. Altered storefront, now a display storefront with recessed double doors. The round-arched surrounds with dentiled brick cornices of window and door arches can be seen above the new storefront.

105 W. S. Railroad St. C 1917 (Former) Four Oaks Bank Building. Intact 1 story brick building with brick corbeled cornice with recessed brick panel. The original storefront contains a large round-arched display window and arched double glaze and panel door. Display window is made up of 3 1/1 sash windows below a Diocletian window. Wainscoting has been replaced with brick. This building was built as the Four Oaks Bank in 1917 and was housed there until it moved to its current location in 1928.

107 W. S. Railroad St. C Ca. 1920s **Commercial Building.** 1 story brick commercial building. Original wood display storefront with recessed double door and wood panel apron. Transom windows have been boarded up. This building is currently vacant.

109 W. S. Railroad St. C

Ca. 1920s

Commercial Building. 1 story brick commercial building with compatible replacement display storefront. Recessed double doors and brick replacement apron. Original 16 light transom window. Modern cloth awning. Current tenant is Diane's Hairstyling.

111 W. S. Railroad St. C Ca. 1940s **Commercial Building.** 1 story brick commercial building with 1 glazed and panel side entrance door and 3 1/1 sash windows. Terra cotta coping. Current tenant is the Hair Connection.

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 10

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

113-115 W. S. Railroad St. C Ca. 1950s Commercial Building. Freestanding 1 story concrete block commercial building with small concrete block west side addition. One replacement window, one blocked up door, and one door on façade. Shed roof porch off rear of building. The addition has large display window and glass door. No 113 is currently under renovation. The Four Oaks Town Hall used no. 113 in the 1970s; and the Four Oaks News used no. 115 at that time. [Williams interview]

117 W. S. Railroad St. C 1926 W. D. Allen Building. Large 1 story brick building with corbelled cornice and recessed brick panel. "W. D. Allen FEB. 15, 1926" is spelled out in raised brick in the panel. Note that the N in Allen is backwards. Display storefront with recessed glass door was replaced c. 1950. Wraparound shed roof porch on the rear covers 2 4/4 sash windows and loading door. A concrete block loading dock is under the shed roof porch on the east side. Built by Willis D. Allen as a general store. Later owned by M.K. Lewis.[Allen interview]

119 W. S. Railroad St. C 1949 **Hockaday Building.** 1 story brick commercial building with flat display storefront. Glass door flanked by four display windows. Wood trim on storefront covered by vinyl c. 1950s. Shed roof porch on rear. Willie Hockaday constructed this for his oil and gas company. Current occupant: Hockaday/Johnson Oil & Gas Inc. [Austin list]

E. Wellons Ave., South side

101 E. Wellons Ave. C 1957 Esso Gas Station. 1 story intact Moderne concrete block gas station clad with enameled metal panels. 2 garage door bays and corner office with display windows now covered with vinyl siding. Small outdoor access restroom building to the rear. Metal casement windows along the side. This gas station was built on the same site as an earlier Esso Gas Station built c. 1925 when Wellons Ave. became state highway 22. Albert Wilson Grady operated this until 1991; his son Charles Wilson Grady has operated it since then. [Austin list; Charles W. Grady, 9-18-05]

W. Wellons Ave., North side

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 11

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

106 W. Wellons Ave. C Ca. 1940 **Floyd C. Price Blacksmith Shop.** 1 story front gable warehouse with façade of Four Oaks green marbleized concrete block. Corner office and large garage door on façade. Sides and rear portion of building clad in corrugated metal. Originally a blacksmith shop and warehouse, it later became Stephenson Garage. [Allen interview[

108 W. Wellons Ave. C Ca. 1945 Wade H. Stanley Stable. 1 story brick front gable stable with ridge top monitor roof. Small office in the west front with wraparound corner window. Large metal door on rolling track on façade. Original side gable wing with loading dock extends to Church St. on the west side. 2 4/4 sash windows flank double sliding metal door on rear. This building was built as a mule stable by Wade H. Stanley on the site of an earlier frame mule stable. Later it was the Stanley-Wilson Feed and Seed Store. It is now vacant. [Allen interview]

W. Wellons. Ave., South side

101 W. Wellons Ave. NC-alt. 1946 **Thornton's Lunch.** Small 1 story front gable concrete block building with 2 6/6 sash windows flanking glaze and wood door. Shed roof porch to the west side covering outdoor eating area. Shed roof brick rear addition with loading doors. Built for Thornton's Lunch in 1946 by Theodore and Merle Thornton who ran it until 1996. The building was originally frame, but now has concrete block walls. Current tenant: Ole Time Grill. [Barber interview]

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 12

Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

105-07 W.Wellons Ave. C Ca. 1930s, Ca. 1950 Sinclair Gas Station. 1 story concrete block gas station with stuccoed Spanish Colonial façade. Garage doors on front and rear. Front has canopy with Spanish Colonial decorative details such as corner brackets on the piers and curved roof tiles. Front office with glaze and panel door and two display windows with 4 light transoms. 2 story front gable concrete block commercial addition with stuccoed façade. 4 6/1 sash windows on second floor façade and 2 garage bays on first floor. Rear flat roof concrete block addition with 2 garage doors. It was built as Hoyt Massengill's Sinclair station. Hudie Temple later ran the station. This is now part of the C&J Body Shop. [Allen interview]

NC-age C&J Body Shop Garage. 109 W. Wellons Ave. Ca. 1960. 1 story front gable concrete block garage building with flat parapet. Two garage doors in front.

W. Woodall St., North side

[106] W. Woodall St. C

Ca. 1930s

Holloway Warehouse. 1 story side gable corrugated metal warehouse set close to the street. Front gable storage addition off rear, loading doors on 3 sides. The warehouse is owned by Carl Holloway.

W. Woodall St., South side

[105] W. Woodall St. C

Ca. 1890, 1947

W. E. Stanley Store. 1 story front gable weatherboarded store with shed frame additions on either side. 2 shuttered windows with pointed lintels flanking a 5-panel door. Sitting on brick piers. Ed Stanley built the store in the yard of his home on N. Main St. Its original location was east side 100 block N. Main St. This building, the oldest store building in Four Oaks, was moved in 1947 by Hubert Massengill to its current site. The store was moved early in the century to a second site prior to its move to Woodall St. [Creech, 8-10-1977, 1-11-1978]

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section <u>8</u> Page <u>13</u> Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

Section 8: Statement of Significance

The Four Oaks Commercial Historic District, the intact nine-block core of the town of Four Oaks, in south-central Johnston County, consists of three blocks of North Main Street, two blocks of South Main Street, and one block along the intersecting streets of Railroad Street and Wellons Avenue (Highway 301). The densest area of the district is the block between the railroad tracks (historically the Seaboard Coast Line) along Railroad Street and Highway 301. Solid blocks of one and two-story brick commercial buildings built between 1904 and ca. 1950 make up the streetscapes, with the oldest store in the district, a small frame 1890 store, located at the edge. Most of the buildings have simple decorative brick cornices and storefronts with central recessed doors that define the commercial vernacular of the first half of the twentieth century throughout North Carolina. A few, such as the former Four Oaks Bank Building at 105 South West Railroad Street, retain more stylish arched entrances and display windows that reflect the Richardsonian Romanesque style of the late 1800s. A few feature the patterned brickwork and grouped windows characteristic of the Commercial Style of the 1920s to the 1950s. An unusual retention in the district is the ca. 1945 Stanley Mule Stable, a brick gable-front building with a monitor roof.

The district meets National Register Criterion A for its commerce significance in Johnston County. Four Oaks was platted by the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad Company in 1886. As the town developer, the railroad constructed a depot and cotton platform that attracted cotton farmers and merchants. Four Oaks became the leading cotton market in the county in the early twentieth century. Numerous general stores and four cotton gins served the farmers in the rich agricultural area around the town. Most of the commercial buildings were constructed between 1904 and ca. 1957, the heyday of Four Oaks as a market town. After the 1950s improved highways and widespread automobile ownership allowed larger towns such as Smithfield, Goldsboro, and Raleigh to supersede the role that Four Oaks played in the first half of the twentieth century. The district meets Criterion C for its architectural significance as a small, well-preserved commercial district representative of retail and warehouse architecture in eastern North Carolina.

Historical Background

Four Oaks was laid out in 1886 by the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad Company as a station on the track connecting Smithfield, the county seat, with Benson, located near the Wake County boundary. The line extended through the farm of Kinchen Barbour. The railroad purchased the right-of-way from Barbour and forty acres to the south from R. J. P. Baker. In 1886, on these forty acres, the railroad surveyors laid out thirteen blocks, six to the north of the tracks and seven to the south. The grid-plan blocks were intersected by Baker Street, Main Street and Church Street on the north-south axis and by the railroad in the center of the east-west axis, with Sanders Street one block north of the railroad and Wellons Avenue one block to the south. All business lots were laid out facing the railroad. To the north and south of the commercial lots along the railroad, the blocks were divided into residential lots. Four Oaks had no highway in the beginning. The Barbour farm was

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section <u>8</u> Page <u>14</u> Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

located east of the town plat, along North Railroad Street.¹

The first depot, a frame building, was located on the south side of the tracks west of Main Street. After it burned, a brick depot was constructed on the same site. This one burned in the 1930s and was rebuilt. It was demolished in 1977.² The long cotton platform, with a gabled roof, was located on the south side of the tracks east of Main Street. According to tradition, the railroad president, Colonel Bridgers, chose the name of Four Oaks from an unusual oak tree on the Kinchen Barbour farm which had been chopped down, then sprouted four separate trunks.³ The town was incorporated in 1889. By 1890 it had a population of sixty-two.⁴

The original businesses in Four Oaks were four frame general stores at each corner of the junction of Railroad and Main streets. The proprietors were C.R and B. B. Adams, N. T. Cole, R. I. Lassiter, and J.E. Denson. These storekeepers also owned cotton gins, purchased cotton, and had farming interests. The only remaining frame store in the Four Oaks Commercial Historic District is the W. E. Stanley Store, originally on the east side of Main Street near the intersection of Wellons Avenue. It was moved to Woodall Street, at the south end of the district, in 1947, and is now a warehouse. The one-story front-gable building has weatherboarded walls, a center door, and flanking windows with wood shutters.

Until the 1920s, Four Oaks was a railroad town. All goods were shipped into town on the railroad. From the depot, local products including turpentine, rosin, cross ties, lumber, and cotton bales were shipped out to distant markets.⁵ According to town historian James Bryan Creech, "Almost everything and everybody that came into town or left town moved by train if any distance was involved." The town population in 1920 was 583. The entire commercial district was constructed of wood until the early twentieth century. In 1904 Blake Adams built a one-story brick store at 101 West South Railroad Street, and Dr. J. H. Stanley and his brother-in-law D. H. Sanders constructed a one-story brick store, the D. H. Sanders Drugstore, at 200 North Main Street. The drugstore, known as the Four Oaks Drug Company, is the oldest business in Four Oaks. The Sanders Drugstore building was enlarged to two stories in 1937, but the Blake Adams store survives as the oldest intact brick building in the district. Its front cornice contains the date "1904" formed of raised bricks.

In the 1920s, Wellons Avenue was paved as N.C. 22 (now U.S. Highway 301), and until the 1940s the railroad

¹ James Bryan Creech, "First Town Limits Described," *The Four Oaks News*, March 2, 1977, March 9, 1977.

² "Four Oaks," *The Heritage of Johnston County*, 61-62.

³ Annie Ford, "Four Oaks Thirty Eight Years Old," *The Smithfield Herald*, March 13, 1923.

⁴ Lassiter, *Johnston County: 1746-1996*, 135.

⁵ Creech, "It was so in the beginning," *The Four Oaks News*, February 16, 1983.

⁶ Creech, Recent railroad photographs; railroading heritage," *The Four Oaks News*, March 20, 1984.

⁷ Lassiter, *Johnston County: 1746-1996*, 135.

⁸ Canady, Bill, interview.

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section <u>8</u> Page <u>15</u> Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

and the highway were equally important transportation corridors for the town. ⁹ Four Oaks was the leading cotton market in Johnston County in the first third of the twentieth century because it had the only cotton platform in the area. The Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, developer of the town, designated Four Oaks as the principal cotton market in Johnston County because of its central location in the most fertile cotton-growing area. The railroad constructed a large cotton platform beside the tracks. Documentary photos show the long covered platform piled high with cotton bales. During the first quarter of the twentieth century cotton was the chief cash crop in the county. Three cotton gins ran through the fall and into the winter months ginning the cotton brought in by area farmers. The gins were the John Sanders Gin, located on Baker Street; the Blake Adams' gin on Church Street; and the Star Gin Company, location unknown. 10 Cotton bales covered the cotton storage platform beside the railroad siding at the depot. With the boll weevil devastation in the mid-1920s and the labor-intensive nature of the crop, farmers who lacked sufficient farm hands to cultivate cotton began to turn to tobacco about 1930. The particular significance of the Four Oaks Commercial Historic District is its history as the major cotton market center in Johnston County from about 1900 to ca. 1930. Although the depot, cotton platform, and cotton gins are gone, the blocks of brick general stores, warehouses, blacksmith shop, mule stable, grocery and furniture stores survive. The overall character of the district reflects a concentrated commercial and agricultural market that was the destination for farm families from throughout the area. Other commercial districts along the railroad in the county reflect primarily the tobacco boom era of the 1930s to the 1950s.

Documentary photos from the early 1940s show that Four Oaks remained a popular trading center until World War II. Railroad and Main Streets were thronged with families on Saturdays, when area farmers came to town to trade their eggs, chickens, and other farm goods for the groceries, dry goods, and hardware items they needed.¹¹

Several industrial and agricultural buildings survive in the district that attest to the importance of Four Oaks as an agricultural market town. At 106 West Wellons Avenue stands the Floyd Price Blacksmith Shop, a front-gabled one-story concrete block and metal-sided building constructed about 1940. Next door, at 108 West Wellons Avenue, the Wade Stanley Stable still stands. The ca. 1945 brick front-gabled one-story building replaced an earlier frame mule stable. It was one of three mule stables in Four Oaks in the mid-twentieth century. Mules pulled the plows that cultivated the fields of cotton, tobacco, corn and other staple crops until the early 1950s when the tractor became available. The brick Stanley Stable has a monitor roof extending the length of its ridge, and a rear side wing with a loading platform. The blacksmith shop and mule stable signify the continuing vitality of the commercial district through the 1950s.

After World War II Four Oaks gradually ceased to be a regional trading center because a highway network was built that allowed area residents to trade in towns and cities farther away. Women traveled by auto to Smithfield,

⁹ "Four Oaks," The Heritage of Johnston County, 62.

¹⁰ Creech, "When Cotton Was King," *The Four Oaks News*, September 10, 1980.

¹¹ Creech, "Life in the town of Four Oaks about 40 years ago," *The Four Oaks News*, May 25, 1983. Documentary photos included.

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section <u>8</u> Page <u>16</u> Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

Raleigh, and Goldsboro to shop for stylish clothes. ¹² In the 1930s, the county seat of Smithfield had become a regional tobacco marketing center following the decline of cotton's dominance in the county. ¹³ Since World War II much has changed in Four Oaks. The depot and cotton platform have been demolished, as have the cotton gins, lumber mills, and most of the mule stables. The general mercantile stores still stand, but are occupied by businesses such as hair salons, thrift shops, fitness centers, and professional offices. But the commercial district is now experiencing a revival. A small arts community has recently begun to rehabilitate and occupy some of the commercial space, such as Sloan Graphics at 101 North Main Street and Barbara A. Keen Studio at 311 North Main Street. The centerpiece of the district is Austin's Feed Store at 105-109 North Main Street, occupying three early twentieth century separate store buildings that retain unaltered, both on the exterior and interior. The high-ceilinged stores are lined with wooden shelving containing traditional groceries, hardware and clothing. At the rear of the center store, a pot-bellied stove and a circle of benches provides a gathering place for townspeople. Here the spirit of Four Oak's commercial district is alive and well.

Criterion A: Johnston County Commercial Centers

The Four Oaks Commercial Historic District meets Criterion A for its significance as one of the most intact commercial districts in the railroad towns in Johnston County. Four Oaks, Benson, Princeton, Micro, Selma, Kenly, and Clayton developed because of the construction of the North Carolina Railroad in the 1850s and a branch of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad in the 1880s through Johnston County. These towns retain commercial districts focused on the railroad. Johnston County was one of the state's most productive agricultural areas in the early twentieth century. The town of Benson, chartered in 1887 on the new branch of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, became the largest of these transportation and trade centers in the county. Its strong blocks of brick commercial buildings along Main Street reflects the prosperity of early twentieth century merchants, planters, and cotton buyers. The Benson Historic District was listed on the National Register in 1985. Four Oaks's commercial district along the tracks is smaller but is intact as well. Clayton retains a long Main Street commercial district with a few early twentieth century two-story brick stores. Selma, incorporated 1873, prospered after 1886 when its location on the old N. C. Railroad and the new Wilmington and Weldon Railroad branch gave it substantial railroad trade. Its commercial district, centered on North Raiford Street, contains a number of stylish early twentieth century commercial buildings. Kenly, Princeton, and Micro contain much smaller commercial districts than Benson, Clayton, Selma, and Four Oaks.

¹²Creech, "Doing Business North of the Railroad," *The Four Oaks News*, reprinted in *Four Oaks A Personal History*, Vol. 2, 1980-1982

¹³ Bishir and Southern, A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Eastern North Carolina, 385.

¹⁴ Bishir and Southern, A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Eastern North Carolina, 387.

¹⁵ Ibid., 389.

¹⁶ Ibid., 391, 386-387.

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section <u>8</u> Page <u>17</u> Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

Criterion C: Architectural Context for Railroad Commercial Districts in Johnston County

The Four Oaks Commercial Historic District meets Criterion C for the architectural significance of its approximately nine-block commercial district. Notable buildings include the ca. 1890 frame W. E. Stanley Store, the oldest store in the district; the 1917 former Four Oaks Bank Building with its Richardsonian Romanesque brick façade; the 1926 W. D. Allen Building with its name and date in a vernacular brickwork panel; the ca. 1925 Lassiter Building, 1937 Four Oaks Bank and Trust Company, and ca. 1949 Barnes Furniture Store of brick Commercial Style; the ca. 1945 brick Wade Stanley Mule Stable; the 1930s Spanish Colonial-style Sinclair Gas Station; and the 1957 Moderne-style Esso Gas Station.

The Stanley Store ([105] West Woodall Street) is a small front-gabled, weatherboarded store with a center door and flanking shuttered windows built about 1890. It is one of the few late nineteenth century frame commercial building that have have survived in Johnston County. About 1904 the original frame commercial district began to be replaced with brick buildings. The present district was largely constructed from 1904 to ca. 1926 in a simple brick commercial vernacular typical of commercial buildings throughout North Carolina towns, from one-to-two stories in height and generally of load-bearing brick construction, although many buildings have stretcher brick veneer façades. Most roofs are flat, hidden by a parapet that often has a recessed brick panel. The display storefronts usually have recessed doors and decorative transom windows. Two-story buildings have at least two front windows, and segmental arched doors and windows can be seen in the rear of many of the older buildings. One of the few buildings of this era sufficiently ornamented to reflect an architectural style is the tiny former Four Oaks Bank Building (105 West South Railroad Street), built in 1917. The Richardsonian Romanesque façade features a large round-arched Diocletian window, a round-arched entrance, and a decorative corbelled cornice.

The architecture of the commercial buildings can be divided into the cotton market phase--1904 to ca. 1930, and the tobacco market phase--ca. 1930 to ca. 1950. Buildings from the cotton era reflect the vernacular commercial style, with decorative corbelled brick cornices and occasional sign and date plaques created of brick in the upper cornice panels. Likely a small group of brick masons and contractors built these buildings. The brick signs, such as the "1904" date on Blake Adam's store and the "W.D. Allen, Feb. 15, 1926" sign on the Allen Building (117 West South Railroad Street) are remnants of a vernacular tradition of brick decoration on commercial buildings in Four Oaks.

The district contains three examples of the Commercial Style of the early twentieth century, characterized by patterned masonry walls, shaped parapets at the roofline, and grouped rectangular windows. ¹⁷ The earliest example is the Lassiter Building (301-311 North Main Street), built about 1925. The one-story brick building

¹⁷ "Historic Commercial Architectural Styles," *Good for Business, A Guide to Rehabilitating the Exteriors of Older commercial Buildings,* 18.

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section <u>8</u> Page <u>18</u> Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

occupies the entire block, with five separate storefronts, each with its own shaped parapet. Most of the storefronts are original. Buildings from the tobacco market era, such as the 1937 renovation of the Four Oaks Drug Company (200 North Main Street) into a two-story building, and the ca. 1949 two-story brick Barnes Furniture Store (100 South Main Street), are a somewhat retarditaire reflection of the Commercial Style. The brick walls of both buildings are illuminated with pairs of six-over-one sash windows with concrete corner blocks.

Two well-preserved gas stations anchor the district on the south side. The 1930s Sinclair Gas Station (107 West Wellons Avenue) with its Spanish Colonial-style box and canopy architecture reflects the national chain's trademark design, an appropriate form for its location along the highway that linked Four Oaks to the national economy in the 1920s. The 1957 Esso Gas Station (101 East Wellons Street) is a well-preserved Moderne-style station with enameled metal panels. Few of these 1950s Moderne stations survive in Johnston County.

The 1940s agriculture buildings have county-wide significance because there are few examples left in the county. The Wade Stanley Stable (108 West Wellons Avenue) is one of the few mule stables left in Johnston County. The only other known mule building is the B. M. Robertson Mule Company in Clayton's commercial district. The one-story brick Robertson stable, constructed in 1914, is "a reminder of farmers' reliance on the mule prior to World War II." It resembles a warehouse, with a large central garage bay, flanked by windows and a smaller entrance. Although this was a stable, the company also sold farm machinery. The Stanley Stable, although of brick construction, has the form of a large barn expressive its function as a stable, not a retail store.

¹⁸ Bishir and Southern, A Guide to the Historic Architecture of Eastern North Carolina, 391.

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section <u>9</u> Page <u>19</u> Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

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Barber, Sarah, long-time local resident
Canaday, Bill, owner of Four Oaks Drugstore.
Massengill, John E., long-time local resident
Sloan, Ron, owner of 101-103 N. Main Street
Stewart, Greg, owner of Austin's Feed Store, 105-111 N. Main Street
Thomas, George, owner of 106 S. Main Street
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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 10 Page <u>20</u>
Four Oaks Commercial Historic District
Johnston County, North Carolina

Section 10: Boundaries

Boundary Description:

The district boundary is shown by a heavy black line on the accompanying district map, drawn at a scale of 15/8 inch = 100 feet.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the densest concentration of historic buildings in the commercial district of Four Oaks. West of Church Street is vacant land and later commercial and industrial development. North of the 300 block of North Main Street is residential development. East of the rear property lines along North Main Street is post-1950s commercial development. South of the 200 block of South Main Street is residential development.

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section Photos Page <u>21</u>
Four Oaks Commercial Historic District Johnston County, North Carolina

Photographs:

The following information pertains to all photographs:

Photographer: Carrie Ehrfurth and M. Ruth Little

Date: September-October 2005

Location of Negatives: State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh, North Carolina.

- A. 100 block West Wellons Avenue, streetscape looking east
- B. Sinclair Station, 105-109 West Wellons Avenue, looking south.
- C. W. E. Stanley Store, [105] West Woodall Street, looking southwest.
- D. 100 block North Main Street, east side, streetscape looking northeast.
- E. 100 block South Main Street, west side, streetscape looking southwest.
- F. 100 block North Main Street, west side, streetscape looking northwest.
- G. 100 block North Main Street, west side, streetscape looking southwest.
- H. Austin's Feed Store, 109-199 North Main Street, looking west.
- I. Rear view of 100 block North Main Street, west side, looking southeast.
- J. Four Oaks Drugstore, 200 North Main Street, looking northeast.
- K. 100 block West South Railroad Street, streetscape looking southwest.
- L. Allen Building, 117 West South Railroad Street, looking southwest.
- M. 300 block North Main Street, west side, streetscape looking northwest.